



Puppy Nipping & Biting

Puppies bite. And thank goodness, they do! Controlled and appropriate puppy play-fighting and play-biting are essential for your puppy to develop a soft mouth (bite inhibition) as an adult.

Puppy biting is normal, natural, and necessary!

Attempting to forbid a young puppy from biting altogether may offer immediate and temporary relief, but it is potentially dangerous because your puppy will not learn that his jaws can inflict pain. Consequently, if ever provoked or frightened as an adult, his bite is likely to be painful and cause serious injury. The puppy must be taught to inhibit the force of his bites, before puppy biting is forbidden altogether. Once your puppy has developed a soft mouth, there is plenty of time to inhibit the frequency of his now gentler mouthing.

No Pain:

It is not necessary to hurt or frighten your pup to teach her that biting hurts. You do not need to thump him on the nose, grab and hold his muzzle, scream “No bite!”, etc. As with any aversive methods, you are likely to harm your new relationship and cause your puppy to fear and distrust you. Furthermore, attempting to negotiate with your puppy who is an ESL student, is as futile as negotiating with a human toddler.

We can minimize their biting with redirection, meeting their needs, and by using smart management to create good habits.

The Witching Hour:

Dogs are crepuscular, which means they are most active at dusk and dawn. This does not mean your puppy won't explode with energy, get the zoomies, use your furniture as agility equipment, *and turn into a biting machine*, during other times of the day (or night), but these are times that we can anticipate, therefore we can prepare!

Give Immediate Feedback:

When your young puppy mouths you softly, praise him calmly.

Greet harder nips with a yelp, "Owwwww!" Your pup will likely do one of two things:

- a. A more sensitive puppy will acknowledge your yelp and stop biting. "Whooahh! These humans are soooo supersensitive. I'll have to be much gentler when I bite them."
- b. A more confident, amped up puppy will take it as an invite to play and bite even more. "Let's party!"

In both cases, the next step is to either redirect or manage in any number of ways.

Enrichment Chew and Puzzle Toys:

Chew this, not that! Not all toys and chews are created equal. Check out our list of Trainer Recommended Products that are trainer and puppy approved on our Behavior Blueprint Page:

<https://www.believeindogtraining.com/behavior-blueprints-homework-assignments>

None of our suggested chew and puzzle toys are meant to left out and available all the time, otherwise your puppy will get bored of them. They should be kept hidden away in a closet or cabinet, rotated, and given one at a time. These are enrichment activities that can help satisfy your puppy's intense desire to chew, re-direct his mouth & brain, and provide mental stimulation.

Basic Obedience Games:

Re-direct your puppy's brain with a fun training session! Teach and practice the following commands:

1. Sit
2. Leave It/ Take It
3. Touch (Hand Target or Target Stick)
4. Down
5. Roll Over

Physical Stimulation:

Perhaps your pup has too much pent-up energy and needs some physical exercise. Be sure to intermittently practice *settling down* and don't get your puppy overly hyped up.

We believe that a walk is always the best gift you can give any dog. If a walk is not possible because of vaccinations, etc., then a game of fetch, structured tug-of-war, chase, or a flirt pole session (our personal favorite), are great ways to get out big bursts of energy quickly.

Positive Time Out:

If your puppy has seemingly turned into a Tasmanian Devil ball made of fur and teeth, and you are unable to redirect or settle him down, it is likely that he is overly tired or overly stimulated and needs a break (again, very much like a human toddler). Young dogs have difficulty taking their own breaks and it is up to us as their people to kindly escort them to a quiet area for designated break time. A time out can be accomplished in the crate, long term confinement area, a bathroom, or laundry room. This “time out” should be made as happy as possible (no ugly face or ugly voice!), and it is important that puppy should never think that he is “in trouble” when you take him to his time out area. Always put one of your chew puzzle toys in confinement with your puppy each and every time to ensure that their rest area is still a good place to be. These time outs are simply about losing access to the fun for a little bit, while giving them a chance to compose themselves and even nap if they feel like it. Free your puppy from their confinement area when they are not only quiet, but totally relaxed. Expect to have to repeat, repeat, and repeat this process!

By way of encouragement, mouthing-maniac puppies usually develop gentle jaws as adults because their many painful puppy bites elicited ample appropriate feedback. On the other hand, puppies that seldom play and roughhouse with other dogs, puppies that seldom bite their owners (e.g., shy, fearful, and standoffish pups), and breeds that have been bred to have soft mouths may not receive sufficient feedback regarding the pain and power of their jaws. This is the major reason to enroll your puppy in an off-leash puppy class right away. Should a dog ever bite as an adult, both the prognosis for rehabilitation and the fate of the dog are almost always decided by the severity of the injury, which is oftentimes predetermined by the level of bite inhibition the dog acquired during puppyhood. The most important survival lesson for a puppy is to learn bites cause pain! Your puppy can only learn this lesson if he is allowed to play-bite other puppies and people, and if he receives appropriate feedback.